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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 FREETOWN 000547

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DEPT FOR AF/W, INR/AA (BGRAVES)

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [SL](#)

SUBJECT: SIERRA LEONEANS CAUTIOUSLY PREPARED TO CAST
BALLOTS ON THE EVE OF THE PRESIDENTIAL RUN-OFF.

REF: A. FREETOWN 542

[1](#)B. FREETOWN 508
[1](#)C. FREETOWN 503
[1](#)D. FREETOWN 501
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[1](#)I. FREETOWN 479

Classified By: CDA Elizabeth Pratt for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The official campaign period for the Sierra Leone run-off presidential election ended at 6 p.m., September 6, amid relative calm. Civil society successfully conducted an impromptu peace march without disruption and with only minor traffic congestion in Freetown. Both candidates continue to accuse each other of attempts to create an unfair playing field and to rig the election outcome. With less than 24 hours before the opening of the polls, it is clear that tensions will only increase once all votes have been cast and the tallying begins. End SUMMARY

PEACE MARCH CANCELLED

2.(U) The planned September 6 "March for Peace" was cancelled after All People,s Congress (APC) candidate Ernest Bai Koroma announced that he would not participate in the planned peace rally due to security concerns and his belief that the ruling Sierra Leone People,s Party (SLPP) has abused its incumbency and control over the security services. In response Berewa also did not participate in the peace march. Approximately 500 civil society members did, however, hold a march for peace throughout Freetown along the designated route. At the beginning of the march, SLPP candidate and sitting vice president, Solomon Berewa, arrived to address SLPP supporters. Civil society members convinced Berewa not to join the march to avoid confusing their non-partisan message.

3.(U) In the wake of the cancelled peace march the Office of the President convoked the diplomatic community and the media to a rare press conference at the State House. However, members of the media expressed frustration that President Kabbah himself did not attend. The presidential advisors, one of whom wore SLPP party colors, responded that they represented President Kabbah, who wanted to ensure that the government was not silent following the cancellation of the morning,s schedule peace march.

DIPLOMATIC COMMUNITY MEETS WITH THE CANDIDATS

[1](#)4. (SBU) Earlier on Sep. 6 the local diplomatic community, represented by CDA, UN Executive Representative for the

Secretary General (ERSG) Victor Angelo, the British, Ghanaian

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and Nigerian High Commissioners, French Charge, and Chinese Ambassador, met separately with the two presidential candidates at UN Headquarters to encourage both to reach out to their supporters to promote a credible and fair process. Prior to meeting with the candidates, the group drafted a press statement from the local diplomatic community, a separate not-for-attribution statement for UN radio and the talking points for the meetings with the candidate to ensure a consistent message. The Nigerian High Commissioner served as spokesperson and delivered the following points, which were also provided to the candidates as a non-paper:

- Congratulate both candidates for the September 2nd joint communique issued with President Kabbah (Ref A).
- Inquire about the concrete steps each candidate has taken to implement the spirit of the communique.
- Encourage both candidates to use the UN Radio network to emphasize their continuing support for the communique, particularly with regard to ending the use of ex-combatants, the possession of illegal arms, and any other attempts to disrupt the electoral process
- Request both candidates to encourage their supporters to desist from disruptive actions and facilitate the deployment of both parties, agents to all polling stations across the country.
- Observe the official campaign end at 6 p.m. September 6, as required by law.
- Take concrete steps to prepare themselves and their supporters to accept the results of the election, no matter who wins.
- Use their influence with media organizations to respect the code of conduct, encourage party supporters to remain within the law, and cease attacking the credibility of the process, international observers and the integrity of responsible

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institutions, particularly the National Electoral Commission (NEC) and the Sierra Leone Police (SLP)

15. (C) Both candidates affirmed their commitment to the points raised during the meeting and stated that they had disavowed the use of ex-combatants, violence and illegal arms, and had urged their followers to remain within the law. Both stated they had no reason to resort to violence. APC,s Koroma pointed out that the APC now has "control of the parliament" and earned more votes on August 11, winning 44 percent of the vote compared to the SLPP,s 38 percent. Less artfully, Berewa rhetorically asked why the SLPP would train a Kamajor army when the SLPP holds power and controls the military. Both candidates accused the other party of acts of intimidation, fraud, or malfeasance.

6.(SBU) Seizing upon each candidate's commitment to broadcast a positive media message, ERSG Angelo had a UN Radio team ready to interview each candidate immediately following the separate meetings. These interviews were disseminated on UN Radio which feeds community radio stations throughout the country.

BOTH SIDES PREPARE TO REJECT THE OUTCOME

17. (C) Both candidates pointed to Kailahun, Pujehun, Moyamba, and Kenema as areas where the other side was attempting to create an unfair playing field. Koroma,s main concerns focused on Kailahun and parts of Pujehun and Moyamba, where alleged acts of intimidation had forced APC party agents to withdraw in fear for their lives. APC spokesperson Alpha Kanu noted that the combined votes in these areas could yield a decisive 430,000 votes and affect the outcome. Koroma charged that Vice President Berewa had abused his position to secure the transfer of 8 senior SLP officers from Kailahun area in order to install SLPP party supporters in key

positions. Though he was asked on several occasions, Koroma has not proposed any concrete actions that the Government of Sierra Leone (GOSL) can take to assure that his party agents can feel secure enough to show up to the voting stations in these hotspots, particularly Kailahun. (NOTE: UNIOSIL reduced the number of electoral personnel in Kailahun region due to open threats by local SLPP supporters. END NOTE)

18. (SBU) Berewa and his running mate, Foreign Minister Momadu Koroma, raised concerns that the NEC was allowing voters to cast ballots if they held a voter registration card, even though their name did not appear on the voter registration list. (NOTE: This allegation contradicts the NEC's consistent statements that if a voter's name is not on the registration list they would not be allowed to vote regardless of whether they have a card. END NOTE.) Both candidates clearly set up their arguments as possible challenges to the electoral outcome in the event that they lose the September 8 poll. As noted in reftel A, the SLPP has already threatened to file suit against the NEC because of irregularities that they believe contradict the electoral laws. Neither candidate is looking beyond the elections and clearly does not expect to lose.

LOOMING NEC SCHISM

19. (C) In a follow-up meeting with the diplomatic community on September 7, ERSG Angelo shared his concern about the deepening rift within the NEC leadership, which is hampering its ability to make decisions. On one side of the divide are NEC Chairperson Thorp and the Northern and Western Region Commissioners. Angelo observed that the Western Commissioner had recently become the subject of threats and intimidation. Opposing them are the Eastern and Southern Region Commissioners and the NEC chief executive officer, all of whom are SLPP sympathizers. Angelo commented that two unnamed commissioners may be attempting to sow confusion on election day by changing the placement of polling agents and the location of certain polling sites within their respective regions. Angelo predicted that if irregularities require the NEC to decide to accept or to nullify results of a particular polling station, the decision will likely fall on regional/party lines and could severely impact the NEC's credibility. He felt that following these elections, there will be a need for reform at the NEC, particularly since it must prepare effectively for the May 2008 local elections.

110. (C) There have also been reported attempts to bribe and intimidate data entry clerks at the NEC tally center. Consequently, Angelo noted that the international UN technical support team will assume direct supervision of the tally center. Security will be enhanced at the center to

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ensure operations are not disrupted.

OFFICIAL OBSERVERS AND MONITORS

111. (SBU) On a positive note, the elections will be well watched. Political party agents, domestic monitors and international observers will deploy to the polling stations throughout the day. The vote count will start as soon as polls close at 5 p.m. During the last election there were 363 international observers, including the Africa Union, the European Union, ECOWAS, NDI, and local diplomatic missions and many are returning (reftel I). In addition, there were over 6,000 domestic observers, most of who will again be stationed at polling centers under the auspices of the National Elections Watch, a USAID-funded program. Over 14,000 political party agents have registered and all political parties that competed on August 11 will be allowed one party agent to observe per polling station.

COMMENT

¶12. (C) Rumors and conspiracy theories abound in Freetown and throughout Sierra Leone as the country awaits polling day on September 8. Observers agree that the vote margins will be very close. Civil society and the international community have fully engaged the relevant players in efforts to promote a peaceful electoral process. The stakes are considerably higher for this electoral round. The SLPP is running scared, while the APC is convinced that they enjoy the electoral majority (based on the August 11 outcome). Although the polling station tallies will be made publicly available, the NEC will take at least a week to certify the final result. In the interim, tensions will certainly rise and there could be attempts to disrupt the process, as both sides react to the unofficial results. Even once the results are certified, each candidate appears poised to challenge the outcome if it goes against them.

PRATT